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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the organization and accomplishments of schools in New York City's East Harlem School Distirct, referred to locally as Community School District 4. Schools in this district use choice as the conceptual framework for the organization of public education. Once students and parents have been informed of the choices open to them, each student follows a formal admissions process. Curricular offerings in the junior high schools vary according to the organizing theme of the school, for example, health or biomedical studies. The reading achievement level of students is the most widely used indicator of success or failure. In 1982, the district reading achievement level ranked solidly in the middle of all districts compared to 1974 when it had the lowest level of all school districts in New York City. English language acquisition and mathematics achievement scores are also used to measure improvement levels. Placement of students in selective and private high schools is also a powerful indicator of a school districts' success. Designed and established by Community School District 4, the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics is a unique high school that stresses math, science, foreign languages, and technology. The East Harlem educational reforms offer clear lessons for larger efforts in American cities. (SI)

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Education Policy Paper

Number 1

MODEL FOR CHOICE:
A Report on Manhattan's District 4

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Education Policy Paper Number 1
Model for Choice: A Report on Manhattan's District 4

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I. Background

THE STATE OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN NEW YORK CITY

This paper is about the experiences of a group of public school educators, students and parents in New York City's East Harlem school district, referred to locally as Community School District 4. It is also about the use of choice as the conceptual framework for the organization of public education in that community. This paper is being presented at a time when growing despair about the state of public education within New York City coincides with the emergence of a national consensus on the importance of choice in educational reform. Curiously, the public debate about the future of public education in New York City has included little serious discussion of the choice concept. Widespread dissatisfaction with the current form of school organization and governance has, to now, yielded a rehashing of twenty-year-old arguments about the relative merits of centralization vs. decentralization. Most reform proposals which have been proposed in New York City consist of alternative bureaucratic solutions to the schools crisis. Some proposals would replace the current combination of central and district-level bureaucracies with five borough-based bureaucracies. Other proposals would retain the central Board of Education and its administrative organization while increasing the number of community school districts from the current 32 to 59 to coincide with local planning boards. Additional proposals seek to reform the process by which local school boards are chosen. Some would simplify the electoral process and move school board elections to November in an attempt to increase voter turnout from the currently abysmal 6 percent; other proposals would replace elected boards with appointed ones.

While the current debate about the future of public education in New York City has been limited to arguments about the administrative structure of the school system, some important issues have not been given proper attention. Among these are the relationship between governance of schools and effective school practices, and the importance of school level management as a focus of reform.

THE CONCEPT OF PARENTAL CHOICE IN EDUCATION

At the national level, the debate about public education has not been about the structure of school boards or the size and organization of school districts. The debate has been about what educational practices seem to work best and what institutional arrangements seem most suited to encouraging and supporting those practices. Much of the national debate has centered on strategies for freeing teachers and principals from bureaucratic rules and regulations and allowing them the freedom to innovate and develop effective practices within their schools. The proponents of greater parental choice in education argue that this type of school empowerment can occur most dramatically in systems where parents are allowed to choose the school that their child will attend and accountability to the central school board is replaced by accountability to parents.

Parental choice in public education is a concept that has moved to the forefront of the national debate on educational reform. President Bush has identified the expansion of parental choice among public schools as "a national imperative." The Governors of Arkansas, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, Tennessee and Wisconsin have recommended programs of parental choice as part of the educational reform efforts. [1]

The rationale behind programs of parental choice is that innovation and excellence in education can best be achieved by requiring schools to attract their clientele instead of having access to a captive market. An important corollary to parental choice is the empowerment of school staff to design and implement their own educational programs so that they may present parents with unique choices. Under the concept of choice, schools are seen as independent agents, primarily accountable to their clients, instead not a central bureaucracy or Board of Education.

Opponents of parental choice often argue that such programs cannot work in low-income or impoverished communities. They argue that only middle or upper class parents are sophisticated enough to take advantage of choice and that adoption of choice programs would result in the abandonment of schools serving poor or minority students. As will be seen in this report, District 4 in East Harlem provides a perfect proving ground to test this argument against choice.

The concept of parental choice in education has received little serious attention in the debate about the needs of the New York City schools. This is unfortunate because one of the few schools systems in the country that has had experience with a choice system over time is one of New York's own community school districts, District 4 in East Harlem. This district has been studied as a model of effective urban education by the federal government and by state governments around the country as they seek to adopt effective reforms for their own schools, but it has not been looked to as a model of improvement within New York City.

The purpose of this report is to describe the organization and accomplishments of schools of choice in Community School District 4. The report is motivated by a desire to bring the evidence of educational reform in East Harlem to the forefront of the debate about the future of New York City's school system and to describe a true alternative to bureaucracy as the means of delivering educational services to the city.

THE EAST HARLEM COMMUNITY

Community School District 4 in Manhattan's East Harlem is one of 32 community school districts in New York City. It is located in a community that is similar to those that are typically home to failing schools. In a city in which poverty and despair are commonplace, East Harlem

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[1] Joe Nathan, ed. *Public Schools By Choice.* St. Paul, Minn.: The Institute for Learning and Teaching, 1989, p. 253.

stands out in terms of the obstacles that its 113,000 residents must face on a daily basis. Thirty-five percent of East Harlem's residents receive public assistance of one form or another, compared to 17 percent for New York City as a whole. The median household income in East Harlem is $8,300 per year; the lowest of all Manhattan's communities and less than half of the median income for all New York City. More than half of the families in East Harlem are headed by a single female, compared to 25% for New York City.

Housing in East Harlem can be characterized by a single descriptor — high density. The entire population of the community, 113,000, resides in a 2.2 square mile area. This is twice the population density of New York City. Real density in the community is much higher when one considers that over 20 percent of the building lots in the community are either vacant or occupied by abandoned buildings. Virtually all dwellings in the community are located in buildings that house more than 3 families and 27 percent of all residential buildings are classified as "tenements." These and other demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

The student population of Community School District 4 mirrors the community from which it is drawn. The district serves 14,353 students; 60% are Hispanic, 35% are Black, 4% are White and 1% are Asian. Almost 80 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch programs due to their low-income status; this is a higher percentage than 18 of the city's 32 school districts. Ten percent of the district's students are classified as limited English proficient; these students come from homes where English is not the primary language and they have scored below a cutoff (the 20th percentile) on a test of English language ability. This is a higher percentage of LEP students than 13 of the city's 32 districts. (Many more students in the district come from homes where English is not the primary language, but these students score above the LEP cutoff.) Reflecting the difficulty of their surroundings, the district's average daily attendance is 85% in elementary schools and 82% in middle schools. These data on the student population of District 4 are displayed in Table 2.

The demographic characteristics of East Harlem and the schools of Community District 4 resemble those of the communities in New York and elsewhere that are typically least well served by public school systems. This rather unfortunate point may be illustrated by comparing the reading achievement levels of each community school district to its percentage of free or reduced lunch eligible students. These data are presented in Figure 1. The relationship between reading test scores and the percentage of low income students approaches a straight line. Simply put, if one knew the income level of the students in a particular community school district, one could predict that district's reading scores with a fair amount of certainty. In this context, it is important to focus attention on those districts in which student outcomes are higher than would be predicted by the socio-economic status of its students. As the rest of this report will indicate, Community School District 4 is one of those few districts in New York City.

In summary, District 4 is of interest to us for three reasons:

1. It serves a poor, minority and largely bilingual clientele; the groups of student least well served by the New York City School System and the population that opponents of choice argue will be ill-served by choice programs.
2. It has implemented a system of parental choice.
3. It is one of a few New York City districts to be achieving success with low-income students.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics Of
The Community of East Harlem [2]

Characteristic	East Harlem	New York City
Population	113,400	7,245,000
Race/Ethnicity:		
White	10.7 %	54.3 %
Black	43.8	21.3
Hispanic	42.4	18.9
Other	3.1	5.5
Age Distribution:		
0-17	31.2 %	24.4 %
18-64	59.1	60.1
65+	10.6	13.1
Families:		
Married Couples	40.3 %	68.5 %
Female Headed	54.2	25.6
Male Headed	5.5	5.9
Median Family Income	$8,300	$20,000
Families Receiving Public Assistance	35.2 %	16.5 %

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[2] Sources: *Community District Needs, FY 1990*, New York: Department of City Planning and *Community District Facts at a Glance*, New York: Department of City Planning.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the District 4 Student Population [3]

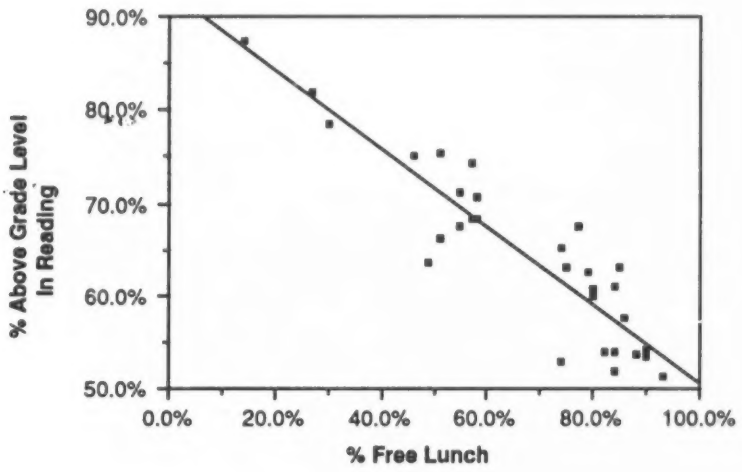
Characteristic	District 4	Rank*	New York City**
Enrollment	14,353	26	655,113
Race/Ethnicity			
Black	35.4 %	14	37.4 %
Hispanic	59.8	8	35.8
White	4.3	21	20.0
Asian	0.5	27	6.7
Students Eligible for Lunch Subsidies	78.0 %	14	71.2 %
Limited English Proficient	9.8 %	19	12.2 %

* Rank out of 32 Community School Districts
** Citywide figures refer only to students in Community School Districts (excludes high schools.)

[3] Source: *School Profiles, 1987-88*, Brooklyn, NYC Board of Education.

Figure 1

NYC District Reading Scores vs. % Students in Lunch Programs



II. The Educational Program of Community School District 4

Community School District 4 operates 44 schools in twenty buildings. This is one of many characteristics that makes District 4 unique within New York City; in District 4, a school is not equivalent to a building; a school is an educational program organized around a central theme and headed by either a director or principal. The position of school director is also unique to District 4; these are individuals who, in terms of civil service status and salary, are teachers or assistant principals with the responsibility for school management.

District 4's elementary schools are, for the most part, traditional zoned elementary schools. The district does operate five alternative elementary schools; each of these schools has a unique theme and accepts applications from all interested parents.

District 4's twenty-four junior high schools are all open-zoned schools. None of these schools rely on a captive, geographically designated clientele; they all accept applications from all interested parents. Some of these junior high schools are organized around particular themes; others are run as traditional junior high schools.

PARENTAL CHOICE AND THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

In a typical New York City school district, students move from elementary to junior high school in an automated, impersonal manner. In June of every year, each junior high school receives a computer generated roster of the students that have been assigned to their entering class. The roster contains some rudimentary information about the students, their latest standardized test scores and attendance records, for example. If the junior high school is fortunate, a more detailed record of the students' performance and abilities will arrive at some point in the fall semester; the records of many students will never arrive at their new school. The student has had no interaction with his or her new school prior to the opening of school in September; students are given no choice regarding the junior high school that they will attend; they have not been asked to reflect upon their interests and abilities and think about the type of school that is best for them.

In District 4, the process by which students move from elementary to junior high school is treated as an important part of a student's education; an opportunity to teach a lesson about decision making and the importance of making choices. All students in District 4 must make a conscious choice about the junior high school that they will attend; no student is assigned to a junior high school because of the location of their home.

In order to facilitate and make meaningful the transition from elementary to junior high school, District 4 operates a formal admissions process. The process is similar to what one would encounter in private schools. Each parent is given an information booklet which describes the

program offerings of each of the district's junior high schools. These program descriptions have been written by the schools' directors or principals. Each parent is offered an opportunity to attend an orientation session at which the representatives of each junior high school will describe their schools in more detail. Every sixth grade teacher in the district is also briefed on the various junior high school programs so that they may be able to advise their students in the choice-making process. Throughout this process the junior high school staff speak not only of their curriculum offerings, but also of the workload requirements that they expect from their students. In essence, a social contract is formed —"This is our school; these are the rules. If you choose our school, you accept those rules."

Once students and parents have been informed of the choices open to them, each student must complete an application form. Students must rank their choices for junior high school; up to six choices are allowed. In addition, each student must write a brief statement explaining why they made the choices that they did. Every sixth grader's teacher must also provide some information for the application, including their observations of the student and their recommendations.

Once applications have been completed and forwarded to the junior high schools, these schools retain control over their own selection process. There are no rules governing the procedures that junior high school staff may use in selecting their students. There is only one guideline; that schools accept no more than twenty percent of their entering class from outside District 4's boundaries. Schools are free to screen their students based upon past academic performance or any other criteria. For example, a pre-school for the intellectually gifted uses an I.Q. test to screen prospective applicants. This school begins reading instruction with four year olds, an activity not recommended for the average child. Obviously, schools must attract enough applicants and accept enough students to remain in business so not all schools can accept only the top achievers.

In addition to reviewing a child's academic record, many of the schools in the district require a personal interview with the child as part of the selection process. Personal interaction is seen as the key to the success of the application/choice process.

The results of the application process are very encouraging. Sixty percent of the students are accepted into their first choice school; 30 percent are accepted into their second choice and 5 percent accepted into their third choice school. The remaining 5 percent of the applicants are placed in a school deemed to be appropriate for them after consultation with their parents and teachers.

In addition to facilitating the movement of students from one level of schooling to the next, the admissions process provides the district's administrators with annual feedback on the quality of their educational offerings. The continued existence of each junior high school is predicated upon its ability to attract a student body. A school that experiences a dip in applicants must assess its "product" and make revisions where necessary. Over the years, the district has discontinued two schools that could not attract a clientele.

An interesting observation of the district's administrators is that the choices made by parents and students are in concert with the administrators' own perceptions of the relative quality of the program offerings. That is: parents can make quality choices; they know which schools are best for their children.

PROGRAM OFFERINGS

The junior high schools of Community School District 4 are characterized by their diversity. Each school is organized around a curricular theme such as Health and Bio-Medical Studies, Computer Science, Music, Performing Arts, Bilingual Education or the Humanities. A complete list of the junior high school programs of District 4 appears in Table 3.

District 4's alternative schools were developed over a ten year period. The administrators who guided this process are quick to note that the development of sound programs is essential to an effective choice program and caution that program development takes time. The district did not offer a full-choice program to all its sixth graders until eight years after it began developing alternative programs. Each school was planned over a six-month to one-year period. Only three to five schools were developed in any one year. The district has also followed a policy of maintaining small schools. Each junior high school was started with only two seventh grade classes and expanded to no more than four classes at each grade level. [4]

In describing their schools, District 4's administrators often speak of the importance of ownership. Students and parents feel some ownership of the schools because they actively chose them. School staff feel ownership of the school because, in many cases, they developed them. Most of the schools in the district were developed by principals or directors who had a concept that they believed would work with their students; the district provided the support and resources to implement the concept. School staff also feel some responsibility for the students because they selected them from among all applicants.

Several of the district's alternative schools are designed to serve students with particular attributes. Two of the schools are designed to serve students who have had difficulty adjusting to traditional school settings. One might think that the district would have a problem recruiting or retaining teachers for a school designed for "acting out" adolescents. District 4 has had no such problem. Other schools in the district are meant for the academically gifted. Admission to the East Harlem School For Health & Bio-Medical Studies is dependent upon "excellent record in reading, science, math and other academic areas; excellent attendance, punctuality and citizenship; and, recommendation by 6th grade teacher and principal." [5]

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[4] Fliegel, Sy. *Parental Choice in East Harlem Schools*, in Nathan, Ibid, pp. 95-112.

[5] *Alternative Concept Schools*, New York: Community School District 4, p. 29.

Curricular offerings in the junior high schools vary according to the organizing theme of the school. The Bridge School offers classes in health, family living and drug and alcohol abuse prevention. Besides the traditional classwork offered to junior high school students, the Harbor Performing Arts School offers classes in dance, drama, music and circus arts. The latter program is aided by staff from the Big Apple Circus. All students in the Isaac Newton School take computer and science laboratory classes and may earn high school credit while still in the eighth grade. Students at New York Prep benefit from a student exchange program with Princeton University and tutors from Columbia Law School. The Rafael Cordero Bilingual school offers a rich bilingual/ bicultural program in addition to classes in Computer Science and all the traditional areas. The Central Park East Secondary School's program stresses the importance of discovery, research, and creative writing.

Table 3

The Junior High Schools of Community School District 4

Academy of Environmental Science
B.E.T.A. School
Bridge School
Central Park East Secondary School
College For Human Services School
Creative Learning Community
East Harlem Career Academy
East Harlem Maritime School
East Harlem School For Health and Bio-Medical Studies
East Harlem Tech
Jose Feliciano Performing Arts School
Harbor Performing Arts School
J.H.S. 45
J.H.S. 50
J.H.S. 99
Key School
Manhattan East
Music 13
Isaac Newton School For Math and Science
New York Prep
Northview Tech for Communication Arts and Computer Science
Rafael Cordero Bilingual School
School of Science & Humanities
SEARCH

III. Outcomes for Students

READING ACHIEVEMENT

The most widely used indicator of success or failure in the New York City Public School System is the reading achievement level of students. Although not without flaws, this statistic is often the sole measure by which the public judges particular schools or districts within the system. Prior to the establishment of the alternative schools and the parental choice system, District 4 had the lowest reading achievement scores of any of the 32 Community School Districts in New York City. In 1974, only 15 percent of the students in District 4 could read above grade level, less than half the citywide average. In 1988, 62.5 percent of District 4's youngsters were reading at or above grade level. This figure was only 2.5 percentage points below the citywide average. These data are displayed in Figure 2 and Table 5.

Since the absolute level of reading achievement can be effected by changes in the testing instrument used from year to year, it is often useful to examine achievement in relative terms by looking at a district's rank among all 32 districts in the city. In 1974, District 4 ranked 32nd among the city's 32 districts. By 1982, the district had moved to 15th and it remains solidly in the middle level of districts today. The ranking of districts on reading achievement is displayed in Figure 3. In 1988, the district ranked 19th; this represents a slight decline over the last few years but it should be pointed out that the districts are very tightly clustered in the middle range, the 16th ranked district has reading scores only 1 percentage point higher than District 4.

Figure 2

Pupil Reading Achievement:
District 4 vs. New York City 1974 - 1988

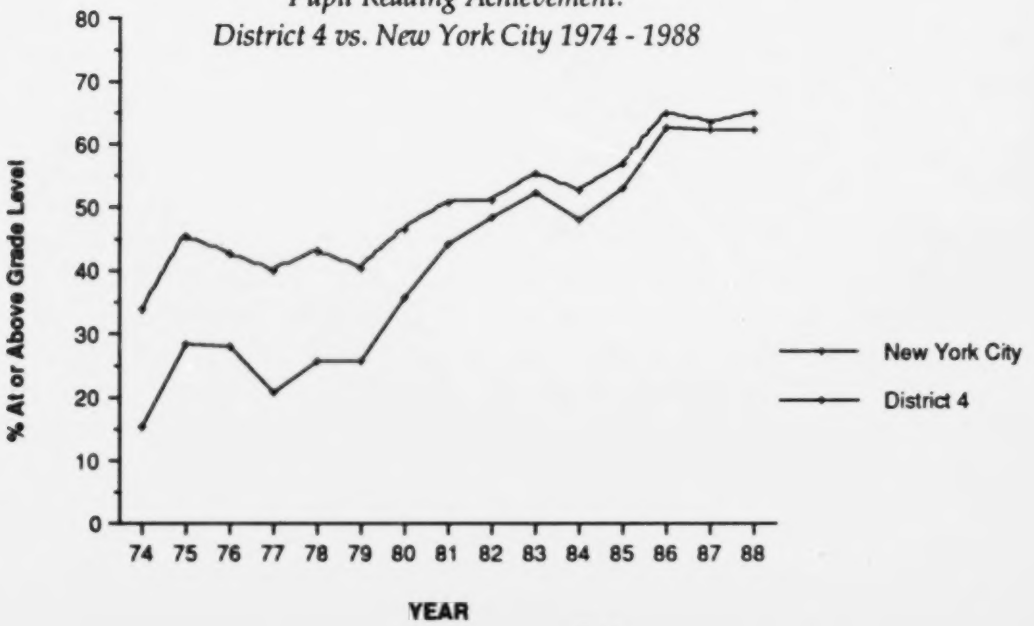
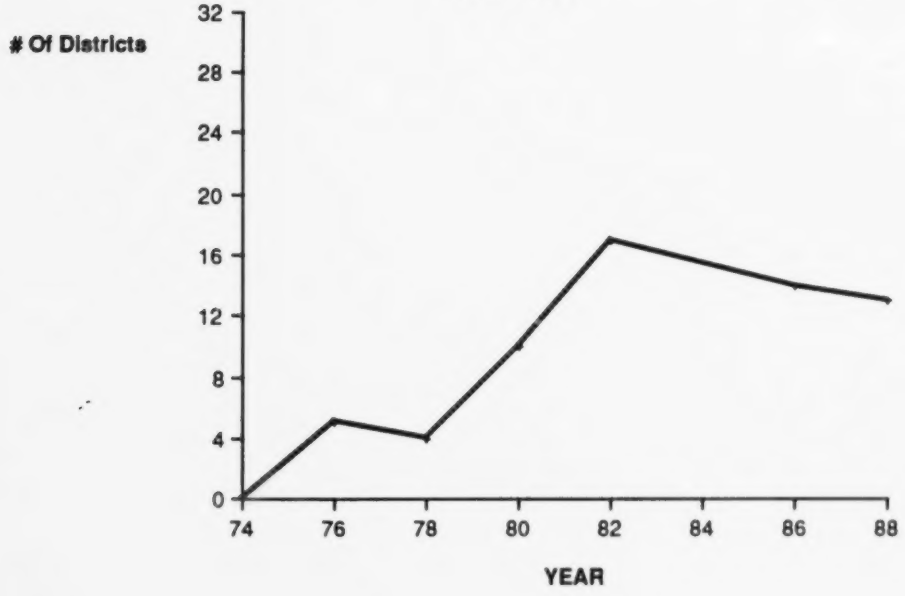


Figure 3

Number of NYC Districts Scoring Below District 4 in Reading Achievement 1974 - 1988



Clearly, reading achievement has increased dramatically in District 4. A district that was the worst in New York in terms of reading achievement and one that continues to serve an entirely minority, low income population is now performing at the citywide average on reading tests. This is an example of real across the board improvement in District 4.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Although the Board of Education does not maintain statistics that directly measure English language acquisition, there is some indication that students in District 4 are performing better than their peers in other districts in terms of English language acquisition.

The community of East Harlem is a center of Hispanic culture in New York City. Spanish is freely spoken on the streets of East Harlem and the community proudly protects its heritage and culture. District 4 operates a bilingual school and 60% of the district's students are Hispanic. However, only 10% of the district's students are classified as "limited English proficient," defined as students whose native language is not English and who score below the 21st percentile on a test of English language acquisition. Although the district ranks eighth among all districts in terms of Hispanic representation in the student body, its percent of limited English proficient students is surpassed by 18 districts. The district's percent of limited English proficient students is below the citywide average of 12.2 percent. No district serves as large a Hispanic population as District 4 and has as few limited English proficient students. Table 4 lists the percentages of Hispanic and limited

English proficient student for districts with populations similar to District 4's. The same analysis, adjusted to included Asian students, is displayed in Figure 4.

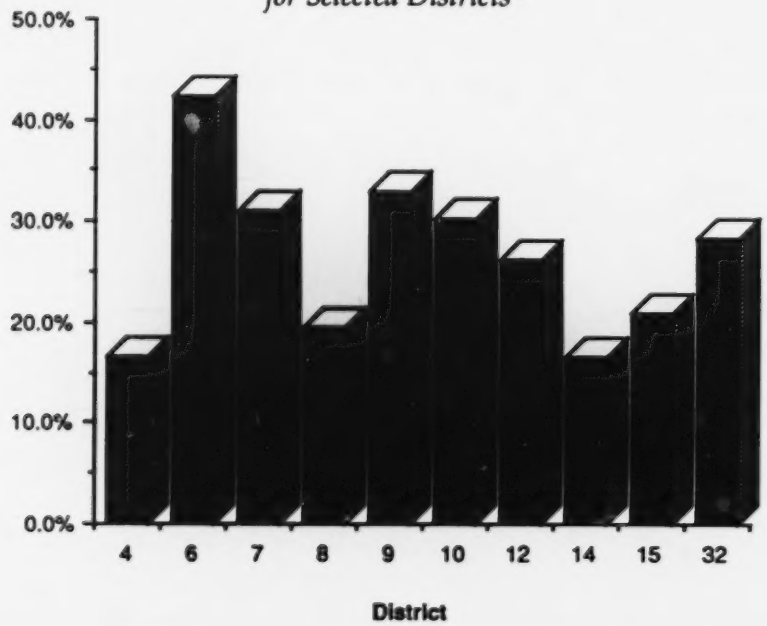
Table 4

Hispanic And Limited English Proficient Populations For Selected Community School Districts

District	% Hispanic	% LEP
6	82.8	36.0
14	70.2	12.0
32	69.4	20.0
7	67.3	21.0
12	67.2	18.0
10	60.0	20.0
4	**59.8**	**10.0**
15	58.2	13.0
8	55.4	11.0
9	52.8	18.0

Figure 4

Ratio of Limited English Proficient Students to Hispanic and Asian Students for Selected Districts[6]



[6] These are the 10 New York City districts with the highest percentage of Hispanic students. All of these districts are more than 50% Hispanic. The analysis is a gross ratio of the percent of LEP students to the percent Hispanic or Asian in a district; since some Black or White students may be LEP, this analysis tends to slightly overstate the percentage of Asian and Hispanic students who are LEP for any district that has a concentration of Black or White LEP students.

MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT

District 4's mathematics scores have improved since 1983, the first year that New York City administered a system-wide mathematics test. In 1983, 49 percent of the district's students scored above grade level in mathematics. In 1988, 47.8 percent of the district's students scored above grade level on a newer and tougher mathematics test. These data are displayed in Figure 5 and Table 5.

The improvement in mathematics achievement in District 4 can be seen in its ranking relative to other districts in New York City. In 1983, the district ranked 23rd out of 32 districts; by 1988, it ranked 19th in mathematics achievement. These data are displayed in Figure 6.

While the mathematics achievement of students in District 4 has not increased as dramatically as their reading achievement, the district performs in the mid-level of performance for New York City's school districts.

Figure 5

Pupil Mathematics Achievement: District 4 vs. New York City
1983 - 1988

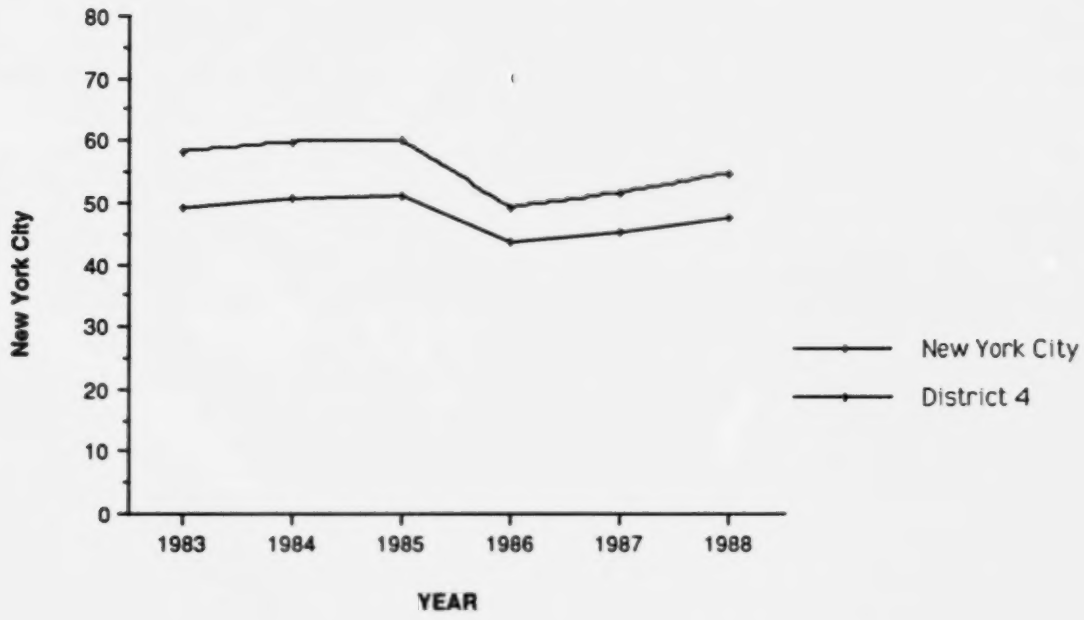


Figure 6

Number of NYC Districts Scoring Below District 4 in Mathematics Achievement 1983 -1988

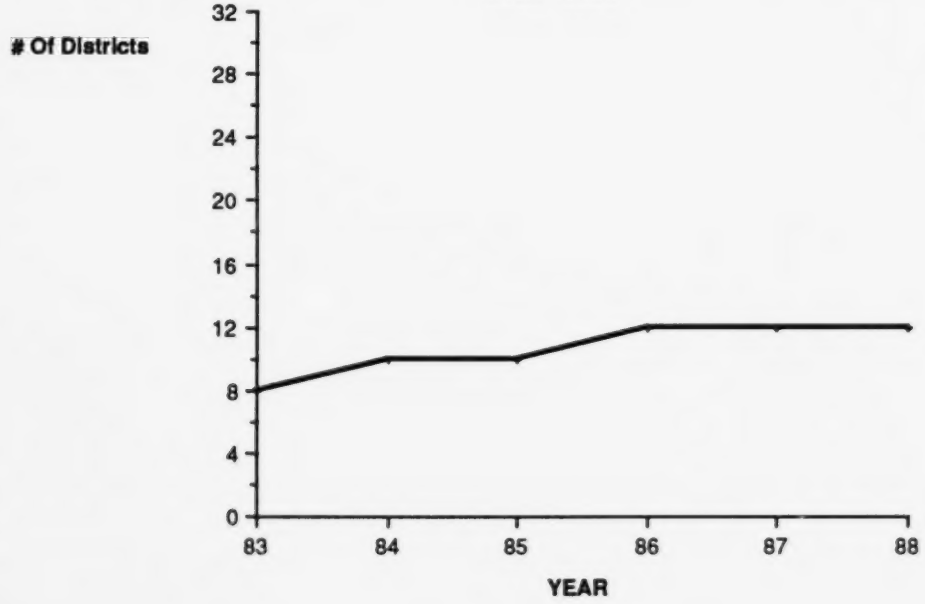


Table 5

Reading And Mathematics Achievement: District 4 Compared To NYC

	Reading [7] % at or above grade level		Mathematics [8] % at or above grade level	
Year	Dist. 4	NYC	Dist. 4	NYC
1974	15.3	33.8	NA	NA
1975	28.3	45.2	-	-
1976	27.9	42.6	-	-
1977	20.8	40.1	-	-
1978	25.9	43.0	-	-
1979	25.7	40.3	-	-
1980	35.6	46.7	-	-
1981	44.3	50.8	-	-
1982	48.5	51.0	-	-
1983	52.3	55.5	49.0	58.1
1984	48.1	52.8	50.6	59.9
1985	53.1	56.8	51.0	60.2
1986	62.6	65.0	43.6	49.2
1987	62.2	63.5	45.2	51.5
1988	62.5	65.0	47.8	54.8

[7] Test Used: 1974-1977, CTBS (1970 Norms), 1978-1985, CAT (1977 Norms), 1986-88, DRP (1982 Norms).
[8] Test Used: 1983-1985, SDMT (1978 Norms); 1986-88, MAT (1985 Norms).

ADMISSION TO SELECTIVE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

Although achievement test scores are important and receive much public attention, the placement of students in selective high schools is also a powerful indicator of a school district's success. The New York City Board of Education operates many different types of high schools through its central Division of High Schools. The most elite of these schools, Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, Brooklyn Tech and The LaGuardia School of Music and the Performing Arts, are highly selective and are among the finest schools in the country. A second tier of New York City High Schools, referred to as Education Option or Screened schools, also select their student bodies according to objective criteria and tend to perform at high levels of achievement compared to traditional zoned high schools. The ability of a Community School District's students to gain entrance to these selective high schools is a strong indicator of the ability of that district to prepare its students for the next level of schooling.

Table 6 displays the placement of District 4 students in these select high schools and compares it to citywide averages. The proportion of District 4's Class of '87 that was admitted to each school is compared to the proportion of the entire city's class that was admitted to each school. This data is also displayed in Figure 7.

The first four schools listed are the specialized high schools. Students must pass a very stringent entrance exam, or audition for Performing Arts, to be admitted to these schools. Officials from District 4 report that fewer than ten of their students were admitted to these schools in the

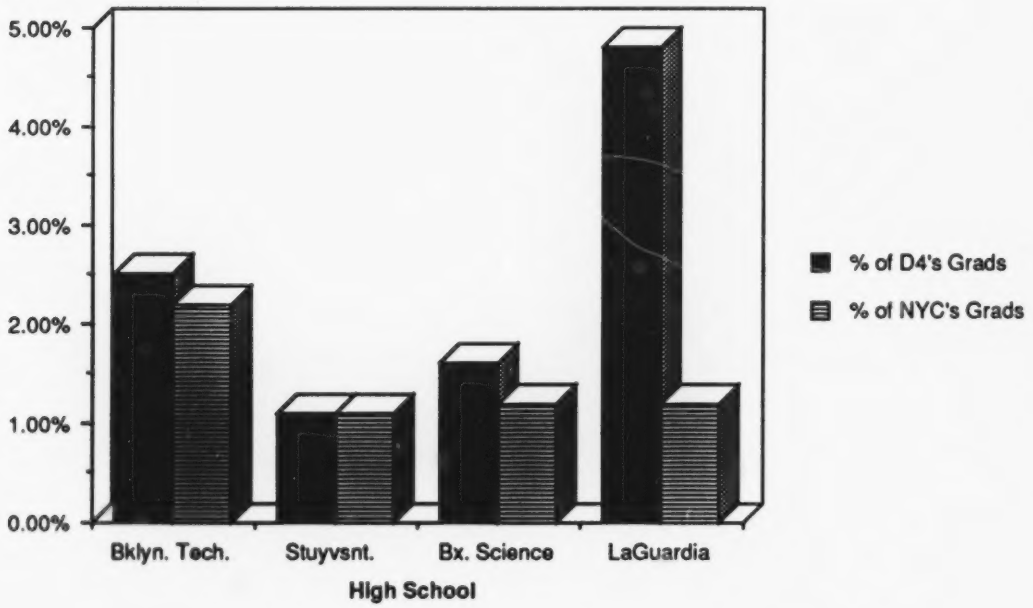
Table 6

Placement of District 4's Students in Selective High Schools for Entering High School Class of 1987

High School	Entrants From D. 4	Percent of D.4's Class	Percentage of NYC's H.S. Entering Class Admitted To This H.S.
Brooklyn Technical	35	2.5%	2.2%
Stuyvesant	15	1.1%	1.1%
Bronx Science	22	1.6%	1.2%
LaGuardia	67	4.8%	1.2%
Manhattan Center	66	4.7%	0.4%
Murry Bergtraum	26	1.9%	1.1%
A. Phillip Randolph	18	1.3%	0.5%
Norman Thomas	70	5.0%	1.3%
Total For These 8 Schools	319	22.8%	8.9%
Private High Schools	36	2.6%	NA

Figure 7

Entrants to Specialized High Schools as a Percentage of Junior High Graduates



mid-1970's. In 1987, 139 students from District 4 were admitted to these extremely selective schools. These schools draw students from every part of the city and admit only 5.6% of the entire entering high school class of New York City. In comparison, District 4 sent 10% of its graduating class to these schools; almost double the rate for the entire city. The placement of District 4's graduates met or exceeded the citywide rate for each of these schools.

The next four schools listed in Table 5 are chosen from among the second tier of New York City's High Schools. These schools operate as "education option" or "screened" schools, meaning that they are open to all, but must select their students according to certain criteria adopted by the central board. The education option schools, Bergtraum and Norman Thomas, are required to select a student body with a mix of achievement levels. In addition, due to a reform adopted in 1986, half the seats in these schools are assigned through a lottery of all applicants. District 4 staff report that their students have been hurt by this lottery system and report that some students feel cheated when their hard work does not result in a placement in their school of choice because of the lottery system. Despite the controls placed upon these schools by the central board, the competition for placement in them remains keen. In 1987, 180 students entered these schools from District 4. This represents almost 13 percent of the district's graduating class. By comparison, these four schools accepted only 3% of the entire city's entering class. (These four schools are not the only

education option or screened schools in the city, the analysis was limited to schools in Manhattan because education option schools in the outer boroughs often give preference to students from their own borough.)

As evidence of the importance to students of placement into these selective public high schools, Table 7 lists the latest graduation and dropout rates of the eight schools. All these schools have graduation rates well above the citywide average and four of these schools are among the top five schools in the city in terms of their graduation rates. Of course, statistics alone cannot convey the true worth to the East Harlem youngsters who have earned entrance to Stuyvesant or Bronx Science, two of the most elite secondary schools in the country.

ADMISSION TO PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOLS

Thirty-six students from District 4 were accepted into selective private schools in 1987. Among the schools accepting students from District 4 were: Andover, Westminster, Loomis Chaffe (2 students), Brooklyn Friends, Dublin School, Dana Hall (3), Hill School (3), York School, The Rhodes School (6), Storm King School, George School (2), Trinity, Friends, Berkshire, Spence, Dalton, Manhattan Country and Columbia Prep.

The 355 students placed in private high schools or selective public schools represent the truest indicator of District 4 as a conduit for expanded opportunities for the students of East Harlem. Over a quarter of the district's graduating class earns entrance to the types of schools that were closed to the community's youth scarcely a decade ago. The reforms instituted in District 4 over the last fifteen years have paid substantial dividends to the community it serves.

Table 7

Graduation and Dropout Rates in Selective Public High Schools [9]

High School	Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate
Brooklyn Technical	81.6 %	3.7 %
Stuyvesant	93.5	1.4
Bronx Science	90.1	1.2
LaGuardia	66.8	11.6
Manhattan Center	86.6	4.7
Murry Bergtraum	78.7	12.6
A. Phillip Randolph	81.2	3.9
Norman Thomas	74.4	15.2
Citywide Average	54.1	27.3

[9] Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment, *The Cohort Report: Four Year Results for the Class of 1988 and Follow-Ups of the Classes of 1986 and 1987.* Brooklyn, NY: Board of Education. All Data represents the June, 1988 status of the Students who entered High School in Sept. 1982.

IV. The Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics

The Manhattan Center For Science and Mathematics is a high school that is unique in New York City because it was designed and established by a community school district, District 4. Although the school is now part of the central administrative structure of the city's high schools, it is relevant to this study because it was originally designed using the District 4 model and, as the only public high school physically located in District 4, it continues to receive many students from the district. Forty percent of the school's most recent entering class came from District 4.

The Manhattan Center was the first secondary school established by District 4. A second, the Central Park East Secondary School has been established but has not yet graduated its first class. That school remains within the administrative organization of District 4.

The initiative for developing the Manhattan Center came entirely from the leadership of District 4. They were motivated by their concern for what might happen to their students if they chose to attend the neighborhood high school. The institution that formerly occupied the Manhattan Center building was the Benjamin Franklin High School. Although once a proud institution, by the 1970's it had become a dismal school, with a dropout rate amongst the highest in the city. Only seven percent of its entering student eventually graduated from Franklin and daily attendance hovered around forty-five percent. [10]

In 1982, District 4 redesigned the school and created the Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. The school accepted its first students in September, 1982. Today the school is an open-zoned school; that is, it accepts applications from around the city.

The school's curriculum stresses math and science. Students are required to take four years of English, Math and Science and three years of a foreign language. All students take coursework in a technology sequence that includes classes in computer science, technical drafting and either electronics or advanced computer science. The school offers advanced placement courses (for college credit) in English, History, Math and Chemistry.

The school's admissions policy is to accept students who are above or close to grade level in reading and mathematics and who express an interest in and commitment to math and science. The school gives some preference to students from District 4 who meet these general criteria.

Students in the Manhattan Center For Science and Mathematics outperform their peers in other New York City high schools. Data from the latest available study indicates that 86.6 % of the

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[10] Fliegel, Ibid, p. 111.

students who had entered the school in September, 1982 had earned a diploma by June, 1988. In comparison, the citywide average was 54.1 percent. Almost half the students graduating from the Manhattan Center are able to earn a Regent's Endorsed diploma, indicating that have satisfied the state's most stringent set of course requirements.

Although the Manhattan Center is now independent of District 4 and its success or failure can not be attributed to the district; it does provide an example of the improvement that can come from a redesign effort accompanied by the imposition of a choice policy. The former site of one of the worst schools in the city now houses a proud and effective institution of learning.

V. Lessons to be Learned from East Harlem

The reform of the East Harlem public schools offers some very clear lessons for larger efforts to reform education in America's cities. The East Harlem experience says a lot about the type of improvement that is possible under a system of parental choice. It also says a lot about the efforts that are needed to insure that more choice leads to better outcomes for students.

THE PROMISE OF CHOICE

The first lesson to be learned from the East Harlem experience is that choice can work. In fact, it can work in exactly the type of community that detractors claim are ill suited to choice systems. In East Harlem, a community that is almost entirely Hispanic and Black, universally poor, and largely Spanish speaking, is making informed and intelligent choices about its children's educations. All sixth graders in District 4 must choose their junior high school placement; most of them get into their program of choice. These students are having positive educational experiences in their chosen schools. The schools of choice in East Harlem are succeeding where many other, more traditional, schools in the city are failing. Students in District 4 are reading, acquiring English language skills, and doing mathematics better than they did fifteen years ago and better than their peers in most New York City districts. The evidence on high school placement presented in this paper demonstrates that the adoption of a choice policy has led expanded educational opportunities for the students of East Harlem.

Increased achievement and expanded educational opportunities are the promise of choice programs. In East Harlem, the type of community that has been disappointed by so many other promises of reform, choice has delivered on those promises.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Choice has worked in East Harlem because of the efforts of a very dedicated group of public educators. The administrators of the district love to say that a choice between two bad schools is no choice at all. They are right. The staff of District 4 spent ten years developing alternative educational programs. Program development preceded the imposition of a full scale choice program and continues to this day. Choice was a necessary ingredient to the development of alternative programs. The nature of alternative education requires choice. One cannot develop schools that are designed to meet the diverse needs of a diverse population and then assign seats based on addresses. The uniqueness of District 4 is that it did not stop with a few alternative or magnet programs. Program development grew as a network of alternative education arose in the district. As professionals saw that the alternative schools were having success, and, most importantly, as they sensed that the district's administration was open to and supportive of innovation; they embraced the concept and offered additional ideas for development.

The leadership of District 4 provided another necessary ingredient for the development of effective alternative education; they acted as a buffer against the bureaucracy of the school system. Program development was not done by the rules in District 4. Teachers assumed administrative responsibility as school directors; corners were cut in terms of standard operating procedures. The leadership of the district provided a necessary buffer against a wary school bureaucracy. In District 4, "they won't let you do that" was not an acceptable excuse. [11]

HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND HIGH STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS

Experience with choice in East Harlem demonstrates another component that is necessary to effective school reform. The schools of choice in District 4 have adopted high standards for children. Evidence of these high expectations can be seen in the enriched curriculum in many of the district's schools. The high standards are made more palatable to the students through the existence of admissions standards for many of the district's schools of choice. Community School District 4 serves all of its children. It has schools that are designed to assist students who have had behavior problems or students who are slow learners. However, in a city school system where egalitarianism is thought to justify lottery assignment of seats in desirable high schools, District 4 is unique in saying that some schools and programs will be reserved for those whose prior academic record indicates that they are prepared for advanced work. In District 4, reform has been directed at students of all ability levels and all types of students have benefited.

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[11] Fliegel, Ibid.: p. 106.

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Education Policy Papers

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